



Wigan Council Local Welfare Support Policy

2018



Wigan Council Local Welfare Support Service Policy – January 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the discretionary element of the Social Fund was abolished. This comprised of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants, which came to an end in April 2013. Local Authorities were asked to make available new provision, using funding previously used to respond to the local demand. No new statutory duty was introduced; Councils were tasked with making decisions regarding continuation of the Local Welfare Provision Scheme.
- 1.2 Wigan Council agreed to continue to administer the Welfare Support Service for the borough with a revised eligibility criteria.
- 1.3 Funding is to be administered by the Wigan Council Customer Services Team. This will allow us the opportunity to ensure service provision has:
 - Alignment with other forms of discretionary support such as Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax Support Scheme.
 - A holistic approach to identifying need and providing appropriate support.
 - Links to wider Public Services Reform work as it develops.

2. Purpose and Aims

- 2.1 The purpose of this document is to set out the detail of Wigan Council's Local Welfare Support Service.
- 2.2 The objectives of the Local Welfare Support Service are to work with partners and local organisations to:
 - Provide relief from immediate crisis for the most vulnerable people alongside longer term support
 - Provide effective information, advice and signposting for people in a crisis
 - Ensure short and smooth transition for people with little capital and low income to settle into a new home and with basic necessities through local partners
 - Establish the root cause of issues that lead to residents presenting at the Welfare Support Desk.

3. Service Outcomes

- 3.1 There are three outcomes that any local service is to achieve. These are:
 - To increase self-reliance and resilience
 - To offer quick and effective support for those with high priority short term needs
 - To provide help for people to establish themselves in or, remain in the community.

4. Defining the Service

- 4.1 The Local Welfare Support Service aims to deliver a holistic and integrated assessment and support process. This will offer a co-ordinated approach to individuals in hardship. There will be a requirement to work closely with key partners to have a clear understanding of routes for alternative advice, help and support.
- 4.2 The service may meet immediate need but will support individuals to access further help and support to move from costly crisis interventions to increasingly self-reliant approaches. This will be achieved through referrals to the Council's Financial support team.
- 4.3 The Local Welfare Support Service will only be provided where no alternative avenue is available or appropriate.
- 4.4 All initial approaches will be received by Local Welfare Support Advisors who are available at Wigan and Leigh life centres.

5. Support and assistance

Welfare Support will be triaged by trained Welfare Support Advisors on the Local Welfare Desk or through online support regardless of the individual customer circumstances and who has referred them. If an individual is entitled to Local Welfare Support they will be referred onto one of our welfare providers for food parcels, gas and electricity, furniture or a combination of support.

At all the following points the advisor will ensure that their advice, information, assistance and support includes:

- Financial Advice (budgeting, financial education, debt advice, utility switch).
- Benefit advice, including impact of future welfare reforms
- Support to employment or training
- Effective signposting to other more appropriate assistance as part of the coordinated and holistic approach of the scheme.
- Effective signposting to other service providers to assist with the wider holistic needs of the individual
- Co-working with a range of agencies as required.

You are not eligible for local welfare support if:

- Do not have recourse to public funds.
- A Looked After Child being supported by the Local Authority.

- A Person From Abroad (PFA)who does not meet the conditions of the Habitual residency Test.
- Are waiting for a first benefit payday or first wage and haven't applied for an advanced payment.
- Are applying because they have had their benefit disallowed and haven't applied for a hardship payment from the DWP.
- Are applying because you are subject to a benefit sanction, and haven't applied for a hardship payment
- Have any savings or access to credit that is sufficient to meet needs or that could be met from another source (i.e. a family member or friend) or from a responsible lender.
- Are resident in a care home or other supported accommodation, unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks.
- Are a hospital in-patient unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks
- Are lawfully detained unless there are plans for release within eight weeks
- Are a member of a religious order who is being fully maintained by it.
- Have applied for assistance with items for independent living in the last 28days and there is no significant change in circumstances.
- Have been awarded two awards for financial support in the last 12months (rolling period) either from the DWP, the SLAS or any other Local Authority.
- The need can be met from another source, e.g. if the Council has a statutory duty to meet an expense, e.g. a Disabled Facilities Grant under Section 24(1)(a) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, or under the provisions of Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Existing disposable income or capital.

5.1 Money Advice

Money management and debt advice is an integral part of this service to meet the outcome of increased self-reliance and resilience.

Referrals to various departments and partners:

- Financial Support team for personal budgeting, basic debt advice and trust fund applications,
- CAB for in depth debt advice, energy switch and money management courses
- Welfare rights team for advice on any state benefit entitlement, benefit claim forms and appeals

Refusal to participate or provide information to assess an individual's current financial situation will result in a refusal of welfare support and / or will be considered as a withdrawal of application where there is loss of contact.

5.2 Heating Poverty

The Local Welfare Support Advisor can, where appropriate:

- issue crisis heating payments, enabling the customer to pay for some short term emergency heating. This will be after the utility supplier has been contacted to request a credit.
- the customer must provide an up to date bank statement before a heating payment can be issued where appropriate to do so
- a maximum of 2 emergency heating vouchers will be awarded in any 12 month period although discretion will be applied to each individual case
- the Local Welfare Support Advisor will consider each case based on individual circumstances and referrals will only be made once the advisor has ascertained the root cause of the customer's problem and, where necessary, made the appropriate referrals to partners and external organisations to support the customer
- referrals to AWARM

5.2 Food Parcel Requests

- A maximum of 2 food parcel referrals will be made in any 12 month period subject to discretion
- The customer must provide an up to date bank statement before a food parcel referral can be processed where appropriate
- The Council will consider each case based on individual circumstances and referrals will only be made once the advisor has ascertained the root cause of the customer's problem and, where necessary, made the appropriate referrals to partners and external organisations to support the customer.
- Where more than one referral is made the customer should be referred for money advice and must attend or receive whatever appropriate support is provided. Customers must follow appropriate advice to ensure their benefits are reinstated as early as possible and that they are complying with their Claimant Commitment.
- Advisors managing welfare will take sanction circumstances into account when considering whether to support customers and may consult with the Job Centre as appropriate and the customer should also be advised to claim a hardship payment.

5.3 Provision of furniture for vulnerable people in financial crisis

- The local welfare support advisor can, where appropriate, provide 'essential' furniture to people in financial crisis.

5.3.1 The items classed as being 'essential' within the various furniture types are listed below:

Essential furniture	Includes:
Beds and bedding	Single bed with mattress and bedding, and/or double bed with mattress and bedding, and/or bunk beds with mattresses and bedding. NB: This does not include the provision of a

	cot; the advisor will provide information on local charities the customer can approach directly.
Seating items	2 seat sofa, or 3 seat Sofa, or 3 piece suite, and/or dining table with 2 chairs, and/or dining table with 4 chairs, and/or dining table with 6 chairs.
Crockery and cooking utensils	Packages consisting of essential pots, pans and cutlery.

5.3.2 All furniture issued through this service, whether new or used, must be formulated, designed, constructed, finished and packaged as to be safe and without risk to health.

5.3.3 Furniture items must be provided within 10 days of receiving a referral. The provider must contact the Customer and arrange delivery of the furniture.

5.3.4 Eligibility Criteria

- Be a person 16 years of age or over and living in the Wigan Borough.
- Lived in Wigan for at least six weeks prior to applying. With the exception of released prisoners, those fleeing domestic or gang violence, people living in council temporary accommodation or registered care projects.
- Not be a person subject to immigration control or have no recourse to public Funds.
- Be without sufficient resources to meet their immediate short-term needs.
- Not able to access credit union, budgeting loans, help from family members and cannot find income in any other source.
- Individuals must declare if they are subject to any sanctions imposed by Job Centre Plus or other agency. Sanctions will not necessarily result in refusal of support and assistance. Officers will need to consider the nature and cause of a sanction prior to a decision being made. If the individual has sanctions imposed we will need to consider if an award will undermine the sanction. The Welfare Advisor would advise the customer to apply for a hardship payment prior to assistance.
- If a person is eligible for benefits and chooses not to apply for benefits, then they would be excluded from the scheme as they are deemed as depriving themselves of income.

5.3.5 Follow the above criteria unless there are exceptional circumstances such as someone who lives at home and receives support from their family or family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances, applications from single people living with other family members, will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to assistance from other family members.

5.3.6 For professional referrals from organisations, there is an online contact form which is managed through the local welfare desk. With this arrangement, there will be a degree of trust that the professional has assessed the situation and the Customer is in genuine need of furniture and a referral will be made for a domestic relief furniture pack.

5.3.7 Information provided may be shared and verified with other council departments and relevant external organisations (for example Department for Work and Pensions) in

order to check information, protect public funds and to identify any additional help and support that might be available.

5.3.8 The Welfare team will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether or not to award a Domestic relief furniture pack. A person will only be eligible for a domestic relief furniture pack if they are:

- Experiencing a crisis or an emergency.
- Being resettled into the community following a period in institutional or residential care e.g. leaving prison, supported accommodation
- Need support to prevent them from entering institutional or residential care.
- A family under exceptional pressure.
- Setting up home as part of a planned resettlement.

5.3.9 Customers will be referred to other relevant departments where applicable, such as Adults and Children's Services, Gateway Services, Live Well, Homeless Prevention and Tenancy Sustainment or Homeless Prevention.

5.3.10 If a Customer presents at the local welfare desk and they don't meet the criteria for domestic relief furniture items they will be sign posted to trust fund applications and local charities

6. Exclusions

6.1 The following are examples of circumstances that are excluded from assistance:

- Maternity expenses
- Funeral expenses
- Cold Weather Payments
- Winter Fuel Payments
- Expenses or services that are provided by another organisation or statutory body
- Housing costs, repairs or improvements
- Work related expenses
- Education or training expenses
- Legal or court fees, fines, etc
- Non receipt or loss of benefit payments
- Vehicle and travel costs

6.2 Crisis Loans for White Goods and Resettlement Packages are no longer available; the Local welfare Support advisor will refer the customer to the good trust fund guide and local charities

6.3 We do not provide welfare support where there are shortfalls in Council Tax Support awards or reductions in Housing Benefit including those associated with the social sector size criteria (bedroom tax). Customers may be able to receive support with these costs via the Council's Council Tax Support Reduction Scheme or Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme.

6.4 The above list is not exhaustive and consideration will be given to individual circumstances on their own merit.

7. Repeat Applications

7.1 The Local Welfare Support Service is intended to help individuals and families to cope with extreme and severely difficult one off situations.

7.2 Individuals are expected to manage their day today finances and take steps to budget and manage their household income. On-going Support and guidance in this area may be provided under the service.

7.3 Repeat requests for welfare support will not be considered for:

- The same set of circumstances in the last 6 months
- Where advice has been ignored or not sought as advised
- Where the individual has not taken steps to remedy the situation
- Where the circumstances could have been avoided or were as a result of reckless or deliberate behaviour
- Where the individual has not co-operated with the Council or other public bodies

7.4 The above list is not exhaustive and consideration will be given to repeat requests on an individual basis.

8. Consideration of the budgetary provision

8.1 Funding for the Local Welfare Support Service is limited and as such the budgetary position needs to be considered when making an award. There will be a degree of trust that the professional has assessed the situation and the Customer is in genuine need of welfare support.

8.2 The fund must not be exhausted before the end of the year.

8.3 If there is heavy demand on the fund only high priority cases will be considered for an award.

9. Policy Review and continuous improvement

9.1 The Policy will remain a working document and changes will be made as appropriate to ensure that the service continues to meet the stated outcomes, objectives, needs of the local community and the Council.